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Martin Legassick

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## FIREARMS, HORSES AND SAMORIAN ARMY ORGANIZATION 1870-1898<sup>1</sup>

BY MARTIN LEGASSICK

MUCH has been written about the régime of Samori Ture, both in denigration and in praise, and yet we know curiously little about it. There are no systematic studies of its civil organization, its economy, its diplomatic relations with other African régimes and European powers, or its role in long-distance trade. For these subjects evidence drawn from archives and oral tradition would be indispensable, and would indeed supplement, modify and correct many of the theses of the present paper. We all await eagerly the definitive study of Samori by Yves Person, based on these sources. But there is still much to be gleaned from the more readily accessible source material, fanciful and unreliable though it may be in part; the present paper is concerned with a less ambitious topic and is based on this material.<sup>2</sup> It is a study of the organization of the Samorian army in the period 1870-98, taking as base-line the year 1887 in which both Binger and Péroz visited the 'empire'.<sup>3</sup> One crucial factor in modifying army organization was the

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on one written for a seminar in African history at the University of California, Los Angeles (given by Professor Robert Griffith) in the fall semester of 1964. I should like to thank him, in particular, for his criticism and advice.

<sup>2</sup> The chief primary sources are the military reminiscences and campaign accounts of French officers such as General Arlabosse, 'Une phase de la lutte contre Samory (1890-1892)—souvenirs du Général Arlabosse', *Revue d'Histoire des Colonies*, v (September-October 1932), vi (November-December, 1932); Lt.-Col. Baratier, *A Travers l'Afrique* (Paris, Perrin, 1912); R. de Lartigue, 'Le rapport sur les opérations de la colonne du sud: prise de Samory', *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française, Renseignements Coloniaux*, VII (1899); Lt.-Col. H. Frey, *Campagne dans le Haut Sénégal et dans le Haut Niger* (Paris, Plon, 1888); Gallieni, *Deux campagnes au Soudan Français* (Paris, Hachette, 1891); General Gouraud, *Souvenirs d'un Africain*, t. 1 *Au Soudan* (Paris, Pierre Tisne, 1939); Etienne Péroz, *Au Niger, récits de campagne* (1891-2) (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1894). The works of Capitaine Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée* (Paris, Hachette, 1892) and Etienne Péroz, *Au Soudan Français* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1896) fall into a different category. Both paid visits to Samori and saw the empire from inside. In the absence of other reliable accounts one is forced to accept their assertions, except where internal contradiction makes them suspect. On the basis of his work in the archives Yves Person has found them both imaginative and unreliable, Péroz more so than Binger: this would affect in particular my conclusions on the 'volunteer militia', the military governments, and Samori's assumption of the title of *amir al-mu'minin*. I am indebted for this information to Yves Person, whose work when published will doubtless correct these points. In addition, there are the local traditions, recorded for example in Amadou Kouroubari, 'Histoire de l'Imam Samori' *Bull. IFAN*, Parts 3 and 4 (1959), and Mamadou Suleymane Diem, 'Un Document Authentique sur Samory' (ed. B. Holas), *Notes Africaines*, LXXIV (April, 1957), as well as numerous secondary works.

<sup>3</sup> Neither 'state' nor 'empire' are wholly satisfactory descriptions of many Sudanic régimes, especially when they are differentiated as is usual by a subjective criterion of size. However, until more satisfactory terminology is developed, there is no alternative but to use 'empire' as an indication that the régime encompassed peoples of different cultural traditions.

large-scale introduction of modern repeating weapons, especially during and after the rainy season of 1891. The supply of firearms to the Samorian state has therefore been studied; so has the supply of horses. In both cases the sources, trade routes and numbers are identified insofar as is possible. Their influence on army organization and strategy is then evaluated, although it is not in any way suggested that they were the only modifying influences.

The Samorian régime developed through a number of distinct stages. At first the political structure seems to have been loose. When Samori declared himself *amîr al-mu'minîn*, thus giving the régime the ideological buttress of Islam, he formalized the institutional structure of the state, creating seven and later ten provinces. Until 1892 the valley of the Milo remained the centre of the régime, although Samorian rule extended over a much wider territory. The area of Samorian hegemony expanded or contracted according to the success or failure of military and diplomatic relations with African and European powers. Between 1892 and late 1894 the state, or at least its ruling *élite*, the army, and a considerable part of the civilian population, moved to the east. Towards the end of 1894 Samori re-established a capital at Dabakala, between the Comoé and Nzi Rivers, and ruled from there until early in 1898. Some evidence suggests that he was able to some extent to re-create the earlier structure of his administration. In the final phase, the state moved once more to Boribana (which Samori had intended as his final capital) and then back to the west. When Samori was captured in the mountainous areas on the fringes of the Liberian forest, the régime, consisting at this stage of a peripatetic following of 120,000 civilians and 12,000 troops, finally disintegrated.

#### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SAMORIAN ARMY IN 1887

The Samorian army in 1887 was recruited from four sources: the regular army, the conscripted reserve, detachments sent by chiefs under Samori's protection, and a cavalry force consisting in part, perhaps, of volunteers.<sup>4</sup> Most writers have failed to distinguish clearly between different types of recruitment, and have assumed that the structure remained unaltered throughout the existence of the state.

The regular army was composed almost entirely of captives and had a well-defined structure of units and ranks. The backbone of this army was the *sofa*, an infantryman with a gun. Binger uses the term *bilakoro* for an army rank subordinate to the *sofa*, but ethnological and linguistic studies show that the term is normally used for a youth under circumcision age and does not have any specialized military usage.<sup>5</sup> Péroz is more accurate

<sup>4</sup> The sources for this description are, unless otherwise stated, Binger, *Du Niger...* 1, 100-5, and Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 405-15.

<sup>5</sup> For the linguistic information in this paper I am deeply indebted to Mr Charles Bird, graduate student at University of California, Los Angeles.

in using *bilakoro* for a 'young *sofa*'. The younger and rawer captives did enter the army in the service of a *sofa* from whom they gained experience while carrying his gun on the march and looking after his horse if he was of a rank to have one.<sup>6</sup> After several expeditions, and as guns became available, these youths would earn a gun and trousers and enter the army fully. These raw recruits might have been genuine *bilakoro*, or might have been so called colloquially in lighthearted contempt. An explanation in these terms resolves such internal contradictions as that in Binger where he describes a squad of *sofa*, in a village where he stayed, under the command of Kali Sidibé, whom he later calls a *bilakoro-tigi*, that is, a chief of *bilakoro* only.

The word *sofa* has been the subject of more serious etymological error. The usual interpretation has been 'father (*fà*) of the horse (*sò*)' and thus 'groom'.<sup>7</sup> This is certainly incorrect since the tones in *sò* and *sò-fà* are different.<sup>8</sup> The precise derivation is more difficult to determine, especially since the termination *fa* is not usually used to designate an agent. However *sofa* may mean the 'firer of a gun', or the 'personal guard of a house', or a 'person who attacks with a spear'. Whatever its derivation, it had for a long time, in the Bambaran armies and those of *Al-Hājj* 'Umar, been used to designate an infantryman whose weapon was a firearm.<sup>9</sup> This is the sense in which Binger uses it. Péroz seems to regard a *sofa* rather as a member of a standing army, though he later contradicts this in distinguishing the *whole* army of *sofa* from the permanent nucleus of *sofa-kele* (war-*sofa*). By 1898 de Lartigue could define a *sofa* as a soldier with a repeater!<sup>10</sup>

The foot-slogging *sofa* was the mainstay of Samorian fighting power, unlike the situation in the armies of *Al-Hājj* 'Umar and Ahmadu, where the mounted *talibé* were the most important element. In this sense the Samorian army appears to have been modelled more closely on Bambaran precedents than on the Fulani or Tokolor armies of the nineteenth-century Islamic reformers. The Bambara armies of Segou and Kaarta were however composed largely of second-generation slaves, whereas Samori drew his troops from a much wider base, both ethnically and in terms of social class. The military affinities with the Bambaran states may apply more widely to the structure of the Samorian state, and recent African historiography is perhaps incorrect in coupling Samori with the other Islamic reformers of

<sup>6</sup> The fact that the *sofa* travelled lightly meant that he could travel fast and still arrive fresh for the battle unlike the heavily laden *tirailleur*. See André Mévil, *Samory* (Paris: Flammarion, 1900). Mévil says the *sofa* could travel 40–50 km. a day under these conditions: Binger gives estimates for various types of travel—(a) rapid courier: 80 km. a day or less; (b) with gun and food-bag: about 30 km. a day; (c) with a load on head: about 20 km. a day; (d) with loaded animals: about 16 km. a day (Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 87–8).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, J. Meniaud, *Les Pionniers du Soudan*, I (Paris, Société des Publications Modernes, 1931), 132–3 n.

<sup>8</sup> It is only very recently that Bambara has been studied as a tone language.

<sup>9</sup> Whether the term was introduced with firearms, or was an adaptation of an earlier term would be interesting to find out.

<sup>10</sup> De Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 131 n.

the nineteenth century. A reformer undoubtedly he was, and not a self-seeking 'adventurer' as so many have depicted him, but Islam was for him a convenient ideology to be used instrumentally in the process of state-building. He sought a new form of state, rather than a return to the rightly guided caliphate.

*Sofa* from the ranks who distinguished themselves in war were raised to the command of a squad of ten and would then generally be mounted. These and higher *sofa* commanders were known as *sofa-kùn* (*sofakong* in Binger and Péroz). Each military commander of a province would recruit his own *sofa* corps, numbering about 200–300. We may deduce that the corps would owe its loyalty to Samori and the Samorian state rather than to its commander in the 'feudal' manner. For the commanders were moved about at Samori's discretion from province to province and do not appear to have originated from the areas they controlled. Also the corps would be integrated for campaigns under a single general, and Samori was liable to demote his generals and even his sons for unsatisfactory conduct.<sup>11</sup> Indeed he is supposed to have said to Péroz at a parade where the *sofa* were permitted to give more perfunctory salutes than the generals that 'the last shall be first and the first last'.

The older *sofa* might be permitted to own a number of captives. *Sofa-kùn* who had won Samori's confidence would be appointed to civil command in the villages, and were then known as '*dougoukounasigui*' according to Binger and Arcin.<sup>12</sup> Possibly this is a corruption of *dùgù-kùn-tigi* (leader of the village) or *dùgù-kùna-sigi* (seated at the head of the village). If the former derivation is accepted, the insertion of *kùn* indicates an appointment from above; local party leaders in the rural areas today are called *kùn-tigi*. A traditional village head would have been *dùgù-tigi*. However, the second derivation seems closer to Binger's word.

In addition, an *élite* corps of *sofa* was recruited by Samori himself. These were captives, volunteers, or the sons of chiefs or favoured persons. There is no suggestion that recruitment was confined to second-generation slaves. They were chosen for their physique and intelligence, and were drilled and taught to handle arms from infancy by a group of 200–300 experienced *sofa*. At the age of sixteen they were sent to gain experience by commanding a squad of ten. The chiefs of 'companies' of 100 men and 'battalions' of 1,000 men were chosen almost entirely from among them. They also

<sup>11</sup> Karamoko, at one time Samori's favourite son, for example. After his return from a mission to France (1886–87), where he had deliberately been shown French military strength, he began to advocate a more conciliatory policy towards them. He fell out with his father and then returned to favour for a while. Finally, perhaps at the instigation of Sarangye Mori, he was wallied up alive. See also Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 109, on the execution of *sofa* leaders. Some of the French reports are exaggerated, though. Thus Famako, whom Péroz described as executed by Samori for paying an unauthorized visit to the French at Bamako, was seen some months later by Binger at Sikasso. He was indeed in disgrace, serving as a simple *kurusutigi*, but he was still alive (Péroz, *Au soudan...*, 167–72; Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 19, 96).

<sup>12</sup> Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 33; A. Arcin, *Histoire de la Guinée Française* (Paris, Challamel, 1911), 127.

furnished the second-in-command to the governor of each province and probably the best among them eventually became generals. In 1887, according to Péroz, the *élite* corps numbered 500, and was kept at Bissandugu or Sanancoro ready to go to the aid of an army in danger or to quell a revolt.

At this time the 56 bravest soldiers in the state guarded the person of Samori. Of these, 36 were the only possessors of repeaters; the remaining 20 guarded the four carronades of copper adorning the palace of Bissandugu, which do not appear ever to have been moved or used.<sup>13</sup> Binger noted a similar special guard at Sikasso.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the regular army there were the other detachments. Those who were wealthy enough to buy a horse and who already had a gun or sabre formed, according to Péroz, a volunteer detachment which would assemble in time of war under their provincial governor. This cavalry force, if it existed, was the precise equivalent of that of Ahmadu and *Al-Hajj* 'Umar, but relegated to a subordinate position. In addition, there was a levy which each provincial governor was responsible for raising. In every village one man in ten, from among those who could bear arms, was in a permanent state of readiness. He would be released from this obligation only when a replacement was named. These, known as *kùrùsitigi* (derivation unknown), would be allowed to cultivate and harvest for six months in time of peace, and during the other six months would report two or three times to their chief. In time of war they would serve 'for the duration' or until replaced. For more important campaigns, one man in two would be called up with the exception of heads of families. According to Binger, certain groups were exempt at all times. These included various castes, though it is difficult to accept his assertion that 'Bambaras were never allowed to carry arms' considering the proportion of the population which they comprised. Perhaps this is a use of 'Bambara' in the sense of 'pagan' (as in the *Ta'rikhs*) and refers to those who would not accept conversion to Islam under Samori.

Finally, chiefs under the protection of Samori might be required to provide detachments. At Sikasso there were such groups from Tiong-i and Niéle. A similar procedure is illustrated by de Lartigue in 1898, who names detachments with the Samorian army from Djimini and Koyaradugu under the orders of their chiefs.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 365.

<sup>14</sup> A group of eighteen 'whom Samori calls his *tirailleurs*'. Only eight had even Gras guns or Chassepots. Binger also describes a group of 50 men from Konia, who had been with him since his first conquests and were very devoted to Samori (Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 96-7).

<sup>15</sup> De Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 113 n.

## THE SUPPLY OF FIREARMS TO THE SAMORIAN ARMY

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century firearms had spread inland from the 'factories' at the coast and on the Senegal, and may have trickled down from the north as well.<sup>16</sup> For the most part these were the 'trade guns' of Birmingham and Liège, flintlock muskets of poor quality. However, with the rapid development of firearms in Europe during the nineteenth century, a succession of new models began to appear as well.<sup>17</sup> In 1874, for example, an import tax was imposed on breechloaders in Sierra Leone, and seven years later Gallieni noted that some of the *talibé* of Ahmadu's army had double-barrelled percussion guns, usually French.<sup>18</sup> Gunpowder was made locally as well as imported, but the indigenous powder was recognized as of inferior quality and was not used for priming. Possibly this was because of its different composition, or more probably because the process of 'corning' was not known.<sup>19</sup> The iron projectiles were made locally; if iron was not available in sufficient quantity, suitable pieces of ferruginous stone might be used.

Samori in his trading days had probably himself dealt in firearms, and when he turned to war he could rely on the *dyula* trading network for supply (as well as for espionage).<sup>20</sup> Sometimes war or state policy might cut a particular trading route, but in this case there would usually be alternatives. I shall examine in turn what appear to have been the main routes at different times, and the kinds and numbers of firearms that were imported along them.

Freetown was an important source of arms, the chief trade route from the port running via Falaba, Heremakono and Faranah to Kankan. From

<sup>16</sup> As the reports of travellers and military commanders attest, firearms were well known throughout this part of the Western Sudan. Gallieni, *Voyage au Soudan Français* (Paris: Hachette, 1885), gives a representative survey of trade-routes, distribution, and the nature of the weapons. See in particular pp. 321, 435, 593, and end-paper map. The existence of some trade from the north is apparent from Caillié's account of muskets made in Tunis that he saw in Timbuktu. See René Caillié, *Travels through Central Africa to Timbuctoo* (1824-1828), II (London: H. Colborn and R. Bentley, 1830) 47, 51.

<sup>17</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century the chief features of the modern non-automatic military firearm were introduced, namely, rifling, the true cartridge, breech-loading, and the magazine. Guns with one or more of these features had been produced earlier, but the average army weapon of 1850 had none of them, while that of 1890 had all. In the transition period a great variety of adaptive models were introduced.

<sup>18</sup> Gallieni, *Voyage...*, 393, 424. Frey, *Campagne...*, 220-4, gives some idea of the extent of the trade. For Freetown taxes and later controls, see C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London, O.U.P., 1962), 398, 399, 500ff.

<sup>19</sup> Gallieni gives the composition of Sudanese gunpowder as 7 parts saltpetre to 2 of charcoal to 1 of sulphur, which may be compared with 6:29:1:1:1 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'Gunpowder') and 7:1:5:1 (Charles Singer *et al.*, *A History of Technology*, II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954-58), 381-2). In earlier times, says Singer, the composition in Europe was 4, 5, or 6:2:1, which corresponds more closely to the African formula. Sulphur was imported to the Sudan but the other ingredients were obtained locally (Gallieni, *Voyage...*, 423).

<sup>20</sup> See Yves Person, 'La Jeunesse de Samori', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre mer* XLIX (1962), 2.

the early 1880's the French were worried about Samori's contacts with Freetown, although his direct trading there was largely with French shopkeepers.<sup>21</sup> At this time the state was expanding along the trade route: Liginfali took Falaba in 1884 and established Samorian rule over the area north of Sierra Leone. The coastwards drive was halted only at the request of the British.<sup>22</sup> Diplomatic contacts between Samorian and British representatives took place sporadically until Samori was forced eastward, but his major contacts were with the traders.<sup>23</sup> Freetown was the only supply area with which his envoys could make direct contact and thus procure modern weapons rather than those which had been 'dumped'. Significantly, Fyfe mentions a visit to Samori by a representative of the Sierra Leone Coaling Company in early 1892 to supply arms in exchange for a concession; this is precisely the time when Samori's major rearmament programme was under way. The French column under Humbert engaged against Samori at this time also received reports of a white man who had been present with Samori at some of the battles.<sup>24</sup> A major goal of the Combes column of January–March 1893 was to cut Samori off from Sierra Leone, and a part of the French force did indeed inflict major defeats on Bilali. Samori retained some contact with Freetown until his capture, although the 1892 ban on arms sales may have affected his supply. In 1893 Bilali was in the Toma area investigating a more southerly route to Freetown, and, when he withdrew eastward with his army, Marigui Cessé was left in this area, where the chiefs were friendly, to forward arms obtained by Samori's agents along a route through N'Zapa, N'Zo, Tungaradugu, Dué, Tuna and Seguéla to the new capital at Dabakala.<sup>25</sup> When Samori left Boribana (his last capital) in June 1898, heading west towards Toma, a major factor in his decision must have been to link up again with a supply of modern munitions, from which he had been cut off to the east.<sup>26</sup>

Péroz asserts that at the time of his 1887 visit to Bissandugu the Samorian army possessed 50 breechloaders.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he mentions the 36 repeaters

<sup>21</sup> Gallieni, *Voyage...*, 435; Fyfe, *History...*, 499, 517.

<sup>22</sup> For some of the documents concerning Samori's approach to Sierra Leone and the halt of his armies at British request, see C. Fyfe, *Sierra Leone Inheritance* (London, O.U.P., 1964), 196, 201, 238–42.

<sup>23</sup> The first British mission saw Samori in Bure some time prior to June 1886. Subsequently Festing (1887–88), Garrett (1890) and Kenney (1892) visited the empire, and Liginfali paid a visit to Freetown in June–July 1885. See Fyfe, *History...*, 452, 489, 504; Fyfe, *...Inheritance*, 240–1; A. Arcin, *Histoire...*, 417, 468.

<sup>24</sup> Fyfe, *History...*, 517; Arcin, *Histoire...*, 513; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 297, 303. Arcin mentions 'La Maison Bolling' as a supplier of Samori, and that in 1892 the French seized repeaters being transported from Freetown to Samori.

<sup>25</sup> Fyfe, *History...*, 500; Arcin, *Histoire...*, 526–39; Fyfe, *...Inheritance*, 248–51; de Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 114. In March 1894, Kunadi Keleba, a Samorian general, was at N'Zapa but must have retired eastward shortly after, for later in the year he is near Korhogo. See Diem, 'Document...', which from comparison with other sources clearly begins from the rainy season of 1894.

<sup>26</sup> De Lartigue believes he was influenced by his counsellors, most of whom originated from this area. This, in itself, would seem to be too sentimental a consideration to influence Samori (De Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 114).

<sup>27</sup> Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 170 n.



owned by the special guard.<sup>28</sup> This would mean that Samori had acquired repeaters, though not in significant numbers, only sixteen months after the French, who first used the Kropatschek rifle in the Sudan under Frey in 1885. At Sikasso later in 1887 Binger saw only three repeaters and a few breechloaders, a figure which contradicts that of Péroz.<sup>29</sup> The import of improved weapons began in earnest only after this, and the major period of rearmament in 1891-92 was stimulated by the French column under Archinard, which took Samori by surprise in a brief campaign in April 1891. During this campaign he may have had only a few hundred breechloaders.<sup>30</sup> But in the following months an assortment of different models, modified and unmodified, began to make its way up the long trail from Freetown.<sup>31</sup> By November the Samorian armoury must have included at least 2,000 repeaters, and by the end of the campaign against the Humbert column, Péroz reports that of Samori's 1,000 cavalry and 7,000 foot-soldiers 'all the first and more than half the latter' were armed with the new weapons.<sup>32</sup> Some of these may have been captured; others, as outlined below, were being manufactured by the Samorian state at the time. Most of them, however, must have been imported from Freetown.

The state's supply of repeaters probably never rose much above this figure of 3,000-4,500, and a large part of the trade even with Freetown would have been for the more easily acquired and cheaper flintlocks and powder which to the end remained standard for the bulk of his army. From the other southern rivers, from the Gambia and even from the stations on the Senegal, this would have been all that Samori could obtain, since he relied here on the normal channels of trade.<sup>33</sup> The description of the guns

<sup>28</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 410.

<sup>29</sup> Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 90, 97.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 151-219 *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> These included Winchesters, Mausers (some modified to fire the Gras cartridge) Chassepots (some modified to fire metal cartridges, probably Gras) and Gras guns of various models. See Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 220; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 40, 41, 161, 307. The Chassepot was a breech-loader with paper and linen cartridge. Introduced into the French army in 1866, it was replaced in 1874 by the Gras gun which had bolt action. The 'Kropatschek' was a Gras gun with Kropatschek magazine system (tube magazine under the barrel) and was the first repeater in French military use. Although introduced in 1879-80 it was first used in the Sudan by Frey in 1885. The Gras/Kropatschek was replaced in the French armies of the Sudan by the Lebel model 1886, a magazine repeater, first used against Samori in the 1892 campaign. See J. E. Hicks and A. Jandot, *French Military Weapons 1717-1938* (Connecticut: N. Flayderman and Co., 1964), 27-30; Frey, *Campagne...*, 60-1; Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, I, 59; II, 260. See also Mevil, *Samory*, 99; Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 261, 292, for different estimates of the number of Samori's repeaters.

Samori's ammunition was largely of Spandau manufacture, and apparently in each box there was a small bottle of perfume for one of Samori's wives! (Arlabosse, 'Une phase...', 431). The amount of ammunition captured at the Tukoro powder store is revealing: 70,000 cartridges, 80,000 cartridge cases, 300 kilos of bullets, 50,000 kg. of powder. Here I follow Arlabosse op. cit. 493. Baratier, *A Travers...*, 106; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 237, differ slightly.

<sup>32</sup> Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 169. Throughout this work there is information on the rapid arms build-up during the November 1891-April 1892 period.

<sup>33</sup> See Gallieni, *Voyage...*, end-paper map. Caravans to the Gambia took three or four months (Frey, *Campagne...*, 136).

owned by the cavalry 'commandos' prior to 1891 indicates that these may have been percussion guns, probably acquired privately from the Senegal, like those of Ahmadu's *talibé*.<sup>34</sup> In late 1885 Frey closed the route to the Senegal. It was reopened in 1886 and Samori was still buying guns at Didi in 1889. But after this both the southern rivers and the Senegal factories probably diminished in importance as sources of arms; they were out of Samori's sphere of influence and unreliable.<sup>35</sup>

The 1892 campaign established the French firmly down the Milo valley as far as Keruane and resulted in the capture of Samori's large powder depot at Tukoro. He now began to look to the east for new supplies and, according to Kouroubari, obtained guns and powder from the Agni through Liberia. Between January and April 1894 he negotiated with the rulers of Kong for guns and powder, and this now probably became his chief source of flintlocks.<sup>36</sup> Despite Mévil's assertion that the arms came to Kong from the Gold Coast, the evidence of Binger, who studied the trade routes some five years before, suggests that the route was via Groumania from Assinie and Grand Bassam, the intermediaries being Anno merchants.<sup>37</sup> The Goro and Baoule were also involved in trade through the forest from Grand Lahou and Assinie to Samori, exchanging guns and powder for slaves through a series of middlemen.<sup>38</sup>

These routes were from the south. As Samori established himself at Dabakala in 1894, he began to expand eastwards also, and Sarangye Mori's campaigns in the Bonduku, Buna, Gurunsi and Lobi areas were at least partly concerned with acquiring arms. There were two routes here, as we gather from Binger and Freeman, each running north and south from a major entrepôt. To Bonduku came arms from the Ivory Coast ports, some of which were sent on to Babatu, a northern Ghanaian leader (with whom Sarangye Mori campaigned in 1896). Babatu obtained powder from the other entrepôt, Salaga. Arms and powder reached here from the Ivory Coast, but also from Diona (Cape Coast), Accra and Porto Novo.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Compare Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 410, with Gallieni, *Voyage...*, 393.

<sup>35</sup> Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 136. Samori had supposed that his treaty with the French would mean they would supply him with modern weapons. However they had no intention of doing so, although they began to provide Samori's adversary Tiéba with repeaters. See M. Colliéaux, 'Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de l'Ancien Royaume de Kenedougou, 1825-1898', *Bull. Com. d'Etudes hist. sci. l'A.O.F.* 1924, 150.

<sup>36</sup> Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 554-5; E. Bernus, 'Kong et sa région', *Etudes Eburnéennes*, VIII (1960), 270. According to Suret-Canale, a French officer was killed at N'Zapa in 1894 when he surprised an arms convoy destined for Samori from Monrovia (J. Suret-Canale, *Afrique Noire: l'ère coloniale, 1900-1945* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1964), 198.)

<sup>37</sup> Mévil, *Samory*, 122; Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 316-17; II, 228. Kouroubari also says 'to Kong from the coast'. See also P. Marty, *Études sur l'Islam en Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Leroux, 1922), 219.

<sup>38</sup> C. Meillassoux, 'Social and Economic factors affecting markets in Goroland', in P. Bohannan and G. Dalton, *Markets in Africa* (N.W. University Press, 1962), 286, 290.

<sup>39</sup> Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 316-17; II, 102, 105; R. A. Freeman, *Travels and Life in Ashanti and Yaman* (Westminster, Constable, 1898), 180-1, 212, 477, 479 (map). However, neither Binger nor Freeman seem to have seen guns on sale in Bonduku (Binger, *Du Niger...*, II, 164; Freeman, *Travels...*, 234 ff.).

Bonduku and Wa, as well as Grumania, were conquered and ruled by Samorian forces from 1895 until the 'retreat' of 1898. But even so, Samori could probably not have got repeaters through these sources. Freeman, travelling in the hinterland of the Gold and Ivory Coasts in the late 1880's, found that the long flintlocks known as 'Dane guns' were in universal use, and continued: 'The burden of importing these articles has hitherto fallen on the natives. When a king or chief has required guns and ammunition he has sent down to the coast a number of his followers to make the purchase and convey the goods home, while isolated persons have been supplied by native middle-men who have travelled to the coast and invested in a stock which they have retailed on their return to the interior.'<sup>40</sup>

Did Samori buy repeaters from British traders in this region, or were his supplies confined to those captured and manufactured domestically? Lieutenant Henderson, captured by Sarangye Mori at Wa, was ransomed for arms, and the victories on that occasion and over the French detachment at Buna provided weapons, including two seven-pounder cannon.<sup>41</sup> Péroz had noted in 1892 that Tiéba, at Sikasso, had been buying repeaters: 'caravans coming from the Volta served as intermediaries between the English traders and the *fa-ma* of Kenedugu'.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps Samori was able to use this method of supply.

Apart from the arms imported and captured, the Samorian state had its own firearms industry. According to Ingold, documents in the Sudan archives report that this industry employed 300-400 blacksmiths on a permanent basis.<sup>43</sup> They were able to make twelve guns a week and 200-300 cartridges a day: information does not seem to be available on whether the process involved an embryonic factory system with division of labour. Samori sent one of his blacksmiths to take a course at the arsenal in St Louis, and it is significant that a blacksmith was included in the mission he sent to the Ivory Coast in 1896.<sup>44</sup> Opinions vary on the quality of the guns produced. Archinard, a professional soldier though perhaps not unprejudiced, reported 'the barrel is smooth, rough rifling exists only near the muzzle, the bore is irregular, the sights ridiculous...but in all these weapons, the blacksmiths have succeeded in making breech mechanisms which operate easily'.<sup>44</sup> The factory was established at first in the mountains above Sanancoro, and moved later with Samori to Dabakala. Production may therefore have slowed down in the transient period between

<sup>40</sup> Freeman, *Travels...*, 546.

<sup>41</sup> Mévil, *Samory*, 163; de Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 113 n., 131; W. W. Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti*, II (London, John Murray, 1915), 426-9.

<sup>42</sup> Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 219. See also *ibid.* 364.

<sup>43</sup> Ingold, *Samory: sanglant et magnifique* (Paris, Scorpion, 1961), 51.

<sup>44</sup> Baratier, *A Travers...*, 84; Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 565. See also Marty, *Islam en Côte d'Ivoire...*, 218, who reports that when Samori was at Dabakala, almost all the blacksmiths there emigrated from Bonduku.

<sup>45</sup> Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 163. See also Mévil, *Samory*, 182; Baratier, *A Travers...*, 84; Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 564; Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 149.

March 1892 and late 1894. Earlier reports speak of 'Gras' guns and the later ones of 'Kropatscheks'.<sup>46</sup> Since the latter was merely a Gras gun with Kropatschek magazine added, the difference is probably not significant, though it could be assumed that repeaters were made only in the later stages. Bullets and cartridge cases were also manufactured, though not percussion caps, which were imported. After each battle empty cartridge cases and even the bullets embedded in the trees were collected for reassembly.<sup>47</sup>

The French mission to Dabakala in 1897 reported seeing about 1,050 repeaters.<sup>48</sup> Other Samorian armies were in the field at the time, however, campaigning or operating as garrisons. These would certainly have had repeaters as well, and the figure given by de Lartigue of Samori's resources in June 1898 would corroborate this. De Lartigue estimated that the Samorian army had 4,000 repeaters and some 8,000 percussion guns, 'fusils à tabatière' and flintlocks.<sup>49</sup> A count of the captures itemized by de Lartigue totals 1,500 repeaters: the others may indeed have been thrown away or hidden. The French in the later 'pacification' of the southern Ivory Coast had to cope with an extraordinarily large number of firearms. Of those specifically named by de Lartigue, four were Lebel rifles brought by a general fleeing from Sikasso, 60 were Gras/Kropatschek, and 15 were Martini-Henrys. Gouraud mentions Winchesters and one Lee-Metford in addition.<sup>50</sup> These may have been captured from the British. De Lartigue's other vague accounts, of weapons of 'provenances européens', 'modèles différents', 'provenances diverses', may well apply in large part to locally made firearms. Previous writers certainly seem to have paid insufficient attention to the importance of the indigenous firearm industry, which permitted Samori to continue his resistance when outside supply became more difficult.

There were a number of different sources of revenue for the purchase of firearms, munitions, and other army equipment. The first was revenue from the sale of produce from the field in each village cultivated for the state.<sup>51</sup> The second source came from the sale of captives. Most of these were exchanged in the Futa Jallon for gold dust or cattle which were taken to the coast for the purchase of weapons. After Samori moved eastward, captives were exchanged with ethnic groups of the lower Ivory Coast and with the Gold Coast.<sup>52</sup> A tithe was also levied on gold production in the state, and Péroz records that this was sent directly to the coast for the purchase of revolvers and ammunition for repeaters.<sup>53</sup> Buré, the chief area

<sup>46</sup> The citations from Ingold and Meniaud mention Gras guns, while the Mévil and Kouroubari accounts describe the weapons as Kropatscheks.

<sup>47</sup> Arlabosse, 'Une phase...', 431; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 267.

<sup>48</sup> Mévil, *Samory*, 175.

<sup>49</sup> De Lartigue, '...Rapport...', *passim*. is the source for this paragraph.

<sup>50</sup> Gouraud, *Souvenirs...*, 209.

<sup>51</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 412-13; Arlabosse, 'Une phase...', 431; Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, 1, 359.

<sup>52</sup> See notes 37, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 413.

of gold production, fell into the hands of the French under the treaties of Keniebakura (1886) and Bissandugu (1887), and it is probable that the network of administration which could transmit the revenue from the state fields began to deteriorate after 1892. This may explain why the Samorian army's depredations and slave-raiding seem to have been so much more severe in the later years of the régime. Captives had become the only means of buying arms.

#### THE SUPPLY OF HORSES TO THE SAMORIAN ARMY

The Samorian army won its battles through the skilful use of well-trained and well-equipped infantry: times had changed since the cavalry of 'Uthman dan Fodio had galloped victoriously over the savannah to the east. But Samori still regarded a cavalry wing as necessary, perhaps because of its superior efficiency in the taking of captives, and perhaps because of the mobility it gave to army leaders.<sup>54</sup> However, the acquisition of horses must have put a greater strain on the Samorian economy than the acquisition of arms. Horses cost far more and could not be bred in the area. Their average life in the empire was estimated by Binger at about six months, both because of their susceptibility to disease and the hard riding they received.<sup>55</sup>

The supply area for horses was in quite the opposite direction to that for firearms.<sup>56</sup> Initially, according to Meniaud, Samori bought horses from Kaarta and the *Sahel* through the trading networks.<sup>57</sup> Indeed one of his chief concerns at this time was to prevent the French from cutting his contacts with these areas. This Frey did from the latter part of 1885 until the treaty of 1886, but after this trade continued. In January 1889 Archinard wrote to Tiéba apologizing that he was forced to allow Samori to buy arms and horses in the area of Didi!<sup>58</sup> As French expansion proceeded, it became necessary for Samori to look for new supply routes for horses no less than for firearms. By 1891 he was buying from Macina and the Mossi, presumably via Bobo-Dioulasso and Kong, according to Meniaud, though Kouroubari puts this transition at a later date. In 1892, he says, Samori was buying horses in the Ouassulu area, and only at the beginning of 1894

<sup>54</sup> See Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 1, 100; Péroz, *Au Niger*, 293-4, 312-13. It does not seem profitable to discuss costs of firearms and horses outside the general framework of the long-distance trade, which cannot be entered into here. Roughly, however, a musket might cost from 12,000 to 25,000 cowries, and a horse from 200,000 to 400,000 cowries. In terms of captives, according to Meniaud, a repeater exchanged for 2-4, and a horse for from 4 to 12. See Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 27, 317; 11, 102, 105; Gallieni, *Voyage...*, 436-7; R. Mauny, *Tableau géographique de l'Ouest Africain au moyen âge* (Dakar, IFAN, 1961), 283-6; Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, 11, 158.

<sup>56</sup> See Mauny, *Tableau...*, 283-6, for a general discussion of horses in West Africa.

<sup>57</sup> Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, 1, 65. See also Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 130; Gallieni, *Voyage...*, 449; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, 11, 136.

did he send messengers to Kong to negotiate trade. Kouroubari asserts that the horses at Kong were obtained from the territories of Tiéba, but Binger's description of the Kong market indicates that they were exported to Tiéba and came from the north and north-east. Horses could have come to Kong both from the direction of Jenne and from the Mossi via Salaga and Bonduku: certainly there was some trade in horses between Kong and the Mossi. Apparently only about 50 horses a year were sold in Salaga itself, though they came there from as far as Hausaland and from Bussangi.<sup>59</sup> The need for fresh supplies of horses may have been one aim behind the northward excursions of Sarangye Mori in 1896 and of Samori and his armies northward towards Bobo-Diulasso in 1897.<sup>60</sup>

Samori's cavalry probably never much exceeded 1,500 and often it was less.<sup>61</sup> Compared with the cavalry of earlier Sudanic empires, it was therefore small in number. At Sikasso he began with 250-300 horses, though within six months he was down to 140. There were undoubtedly army horses in other parts of the state at this time however.<sup>62</sup> On major campaigns and parades we have reports of 400 to 1,000 cavalry; in skirmishes the number is usually much less. Fabou chased the French force retiring from Keniéra with 60 cavalry. The detachment harassing the French post at Kankan in 1891 was probably at no time more than 200. The detachment which the French mission saw at Dabakala in 1897 was 1,000, and de Lartigue's information in June 1898 was that Samori's cavalry forces were between 1,000 and 2,000. Only 60 horses were captured with Samori himself, and the total number taken during the last three months of the campaign is nowhere mentioned. The mortality rate must however have been high in the forest regions in which he was travelling.<sup>63</sup>

The Samorian state appears to have strictly controlled the marketing of horses. Binger writes that only Samori himself (meaning his administration) could purchase horses in the market.<sup>64</sup> The private purchase of horses by the 'volunteer' cavalry force described by Péroz would seem to contradict this: either Binger was incorrect or the private cavalry did not exist.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 1, 65; Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 555; Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 316-17; II, 105; Bernus, 'Kong et sa région', 265-75. Most of the Mossi horses came from the Yatenga region.

<sup>60</sup> See A. Colliciaux, 'Détails rétrospectifs sur l'histoire des dernières opérations contre Samori et la prise de l'Almamy, 1897-8'. *Bull. Com. d'Études hist. sci. de l'A.O.F.*, 1938, 296.

<sup>61</sup> The figure of 5,000 attributed to Péroz by Frey is probably an over-estimate (Frey, *Campagne...*, 107-8). Archinard in 1891 reported that Samori was trying to increase cavalry strength to 2,000-3,000; certainly this force was never evident in campaigns (Meniaud, ...*Pionniers...*, 158).

<sup>62</sup> Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 99-100, gives the strength at Sikasso. Binger was met elsewhere by a force of 32 cavalry, though he remarks that only 12 were of passable quality. (Ibid. 1, 19-20).

<sup>63</sup> See Meniaud, ...*Pionniers...*, 1, 161; II, 183; Mévil, *Samory*, 175; de Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 115, 136; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 12-39, 169, 177, 285. Diem describes however the capture of 2,500 horses in a campaign against Babemba in the dry season of 1894-95. (Diem, 'Document...'). See also notes 72, 75.

<sup>64</sup> Binger, *Du Niger...* 1, 27.

Probably private trade, and with it the militia, diminished in magnitude as French pressure forced the Samorian state on to a more stringent war footing in the period after 1885.

#### CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION AND TACTICS OF THE SAMORIAN ARMY

The outline description of the Samorian army by Binger and Péroz can be taken as a model against which to set other evidence gathered at various times in the history of the empire. Changes in the army structure may then be compared with the information in preceding sections on the supply of firearms and horses to suggest possible causes for change.

In the early stages of Samori's conquests there would not have been a formal distinction between the four sources of army recruitment, except that volunteers would have more chance of withdrawal from service than captives. The various traditions of Samori's rise all show that he began his conquests with the nucleus of a regular force, composed either of previously acquired captives or of an army whose allegiance he had won.<sup>65</sup> The probably unreliable document quoted by Duboc states that his army numbered 500 in his first battle, and, according to Péroz, after the defeat of Famadu of Kunadugu (probably 1873) 'his army grew larger every day with the best *sofa* of neighbouring princes'.<sup>66</sup>

After 1877 the delegated structure of authority broadened when Samori sent two of his brothers, Malinke Mori and Fabu Ture, against Sori Ibrahim because, according to Kouroubari, he was reluctant to fight himself against his former master. These were the first *kùn-tigi* (appointed leaders), as generals acting independently of Samori were called, in contrast to *kélé-tigi* (war-leader) when they were under his field command. At first they were his relatives or *griots*, and leaders with an independent army who allied themselves voluntarily with him.<sup>67</sup> After Samori assumed a new politico-religious title, which Péroz perhaps incorrectly assumed was that of *amir al mu'minin*, he ceased to campaign in person so extensively, and divided his armies into corps (first seven and then ten), 'now having occasion to reunite them only to combat an adversary worthy of him'.<sup>68</sup> The number of times that the French reported that Samori had escaped

<sup>65</sup> For these traditions see Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 388-400; Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 140-50; Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 544-6; Fofana Kalil, 'Almamy Samori: l'homme et son œuvre', *Recherches Africaines*, I (January-March 1963), 7-14; F. F. Duboc, *Samory le Sanglant* (Paris, Sfelt, 1947), 197-200. The last citation is to a document by Mohamed Denfa received by the French presumably at some time between 1882 and 1887.

<sup>66</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 392.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Amara Diali (a *griot*), Mori-fin-dian (counsellor and childhood friend), Nassikha Mahdi (a brother of Samori's who died in about 1886), Alpha Umar (a cousin of Samori's), Mori Ture (who had built up an army and territory in the Odienné area and then allied with Samori, marrying his eldest daughter). See Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 132, 134; Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 336, 397, 404-5; Marty, *Islam en Côte d'Ivoire...*, 84-5, 113.

<sup>68</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 398.

from a battle by the skin of his teeth might seem to belie this, but very often the white-robed horseman was another general. However, Samori was present at least in the campaigns of 1885 and 1892. The number of generals increased, and as time went by more of them seem to have been chosen for their specific military capacity.<sup>69</sup>

In the succeeding years the centre of the empire must have been at its most peaceful, with the French only nibbling at the outer fringes. Estimates of the total population of the empire at this time vary between 280,000 and 1,500,000.<sup>70</sup> Assuming that this was equally distributed among the provinces, and that one quarter of the population were able-bodied men, and neglecting the exempted groups, this gives a guideline for the reserve of each province at between 700 and 3,750 for the first call-up, and 3,500 to 18,750 for the second. Péroz records that the maximum call-up in each province produced only 12,000 men 'because of the deficient surveillance exercised over the regularity of the levy'.<sup>71</sup> The figures indicate a maximum total army of reservists of 35,000 to 187,000. In fact the highest estimate of a Samorian army in the field is 20,000, though Péroz has been quoted as saying that the army totalled 50,000 men distributed through the empire, and not all at Samori's disposal.<sup>72</sup> The discrepancy between theory and practice is not hard to understand in view of the initial assumptions, the incomplete control over the levy, the impossibility of supplying too large an army with food, available weapons, the necessity for keeping garrisons at home, and campaigns in other areas where numbers involved are not mentioned. The discrepancy is underlined even more at the siege of Sikasso, where Binger estimated the army to be not more than 5,000, although it included contingents from most parts of the empire.<sup>73</sup> Replacements must have been continually forthcoming, however (suggesting that this was a '1 in 10' call-up), because estimates of the army's losses in the siege vary from 7,000-8,000 to 15,000-20,000 men.

Several corps were often united in the field under a single command.

<sup>69</sup> Such as Liginfali, Bilali, Sekuba and Kunadi Keleba. None is mentioned as a relative of Samori. (There was almost certainly more than one general called Sekuba, though it is impossible to discuss this here.)

<sup>70</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 376; Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 122. The Binger calculation, lower of the two, is methodologically spurious. Péroz gives no basis at all for his estimate.

<sup>71</sup> Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 408. This figure parallels that given by Mohamed Denfa: when the army was divided up between several chiefs, he says, each had a force of 12,000 warriors. The two sources may not be independent (Duboc, *Samory...*, 197-200).

<sup>72</sup> Frey, *Campagne...*, 107-8. The largest army was that of 20,000 which campaigned against the French at the beginning of 1885: its reserve of 5,000 was not used as such, even in the battle of Kokoro (Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 12, 314, 408). The cavalry strength may have been as great as 1,000 since the army of 10,000 at the battle of Kommodo had 400-500 cavalry and also Samori is reported to have lost 400-500 horses in the campaign (Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 12, 277; Duboc, *Samory...*, 61). There were certainly other forces in the field at the time: Amara Diali in the south-east and Liginfali in the south-west, and perhaps Bilali also (Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 134, 149).

<sup>73</sup> Binger, *Du Niger...*, 1, 96-99, gives a complete list. In the one encampment that he counted rather than estimated there were between 320 and 340 troops under Fabu Toure, drawn from Ouolosegubu, Kangare and Faraba.



The army which campaigned against the French at the beginning of 1885 had three corps of 5,000 each under the commands of Malinke Mori, Fabu Touré, and another brother (Nassikha Mahdi?), with 5,000 in the reserve under Samori himself who was in overall command.<sup>74</sup> Malinke Mori's army of 8,000–10,000 men at the end of 1885 probably consisted of at least two such corps.<sup>75</sup> A normal campaigning army at this time might comprise between 3,000 and 5,000 men: such as that of Fabu in the 1883 campaign around Bamako, the army besieging Keniéra in 1881, or that of Bolé Mamoru marching against Tiéba in 1890.<sup>76</sup>

In the sources from which these estimates are derived, little distinction is made among the different recruitment areas.<sup>77</sup> Since the regular army at this time would have comprised between 2,500 and 3,500 men, and since many of them would have remained on garrison duty in their provinces, an army in battle at this time can be visualized as consisting primarily of reservists directed by permanent army *sofa-kun*. Vivid contemporary descriptions of mounted men with whips urging the infantry to the attack would substantiate this.<sup>78</sup> The cavalry consisted of as many *sofa-kun* as could be mounted and such volunteer horsemen as there were. In various campaigns its strength is estimated as between 400 and 1,000. In the event of a cavalry charge, half the chiefs of squads of ten would leave their detachments and join the cavalry.

The poor quality of the army's firearms at this time, as regards range, accuracy and speed of reloading, forced a reliance on numbers to combat the French. This, by diminishing the mobility of the army, conditioned Samorian strategy. Major battles were fought by carefully arranged fixed lines. Once these were broken there was little hope of re-forming the army for further offence or defence on the same day. The use of small skirmishing forces to chase retreating French troops was rare and ineffective. When they were used (e.g. Fabu with a small cavalry force after Keniéra in 1882), they had to get ahead of the retreating force, dismount, and form an ambush, rather than use tactics of constant harassment, as would have been possible with less cumbersome firearms. Only a large army could hope to pose

<sup>74</sup> See note 72.

<sup>75</sup> Frey, *Campagne...*, 106. One source reports that there were 1,000 cavalry with the army (Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 549).

<sup>76</sup> Meniaud, ...*Pionniers...*, 1, 159–61, 177, 558; Mévil *Samory*, 33; Peroz, *Au Soudan...*, 10. Estimates for Keniéra vary wildly from 400 to 10,000 men! Mévil's of 4,000 is probably most accurate, since there were four *diassas* (camps surrounded by palisades) around the town, each possibly containing a 'battalion' of 1,000.

<sup>77</sup> The only evidence found which differentiates between regular army and reservists is in Péroz's account of his visit to Kenieba-Kura for the treaty of 1886. Behind Samori was his guard of 500 young men. On one side was Malinke Mori with 200 cavalry, and behind him five companies of 200 young men each (regular army from five provinces?). 'On the other flank, rather scattered but in distinct groups, were ranged the troops called from neighbouring regions to assist at this imposing ceremony...' (Meniaud, ...*Pionniers...*, 1, 254).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, the description of the siege of Niafadié in 1885 (Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 296–302).

a threat to a retreating French force. Thus at the battle of Kokoro, the Samorian army numbered 15,000 but could offer only this single and carefully planned serious threat to the French before they entered their fort at Niagassola. The harassment during the remainder of the French retreat from Niafadié had been largely ineffectual, except as a delaying tactic.<sup>79</sup>

When combat with the French was resumed in the 1890's, the number of Samorian troops involved in campaigns was far fewer. The *sofa* line in the major engagements of the 1891 and 1892 campaigns was never over 2,000 and usually less, and the 'guerilla' detachments which harassed every French force as it retreated from its point of maximum penetration were much smaller.<sup>80</sup> French observers were amazed at the discipline and manoeuvrability of the Samorian forces, and their earlier derogatory remarks on African musketry were replaced by comments on the accuracy of Samori's riflemen.<sup>81</sup> The new firearms were in large measure responsible for this. Breechloaders could be reloaded from a *prone* position, and the use of a cartridge speeded the reloading. Repeaters improved the situation further. The *sofa* could thus reload in safety without withdrawing temporarily from the firing line and being replaced. This permitted more extensive use of the same manpower, or alternatively a retention of the same firepower in a line with smaller forces. Samori used smaller forces which could be more easily supplied and better trained and which were also more mobile. At this time he began to use *tirailleur* deserters, and perhaps also veterans of the British forces in Sierra Leone, to introduce greater discipline in the army.<sup>82</sup> Snipers and cavalry skirmishing groups (which could now fire without dismounting) began to be used more extensively. More

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 303-17.

<sup>80</sup> For the major engagements see Mévil, *Samory*, 99; Meniaud, ...*Pionniers...*, II, 163; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 160, 166, 285, etc. The numbers for the 'guerilla' detachments are often not given though it is evident they are small. See, for example, Péroz, *Au Niger...*, *passim*, and Arlabosse, 'Une phase...', *passim*. A clear instance was in the campaign against the Combes column (February-March 1893), when Samori retired east and south until the French were exhausted and, when Combes turned back, split the army into small groups to harass him (Mével, *Samory*, 112-17).

<sup>81</sup> Péroz, who had once written that Samori's guns 'never fired at more than thirty paces with any chance of success', now found himself fired at at a distance of 700 yards with considerable accuracy! (Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 347; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 211). Péroz and Baratier amongst others were high in their praise of the Samorian army.

<sup>82</sup> See Meniaud, ...*Pionniers...*, II, 151; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 40. Baratier cites the case of N'Golo, a *tirailleur* who became a Samorian *sofa-kùn*, and the more dramatic instance of Koruba Mussa, who 'deserted' to the French at Kankan in 1891. Enrolled in the *spahi* force (cavalry) he disappeared after being sent on a mission from the battlefield. He delivered the message, which is ironic, and was assumed killed. However, in the campaign of 1892 the charging *spahi* force was brought to a halt in one battle by the voice of Koruba Mussa calling from the line of *sofa*. He had acquired valuable experience in the 'winter school'! (Baratier, *A Travers...*, 80-4; Arlabosse, 'Une phase...', *passim*). French commands and techniques were introduced to a considerable extent, as is evident from a comparison of the descriptions by Binger and Péroz in 1887 with that of the French mission of 1897. On occasion French commands and bugle calls would be used by the *sofa* to confuse their enemy (Binger, *Du Niger...*, I, 104ff.; Péroz, *Au Soudan...*, 411; Mévil, *Samory*, 174-6; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 159).

than one fixed-line battle would be fought on the same day, as Samori withdrew his troops in an orderly fashion to another line of defence.<sup>83</sup>

The regular army probably, therefore, replaced the reserve as the main strength of the Samorian army from this time. Expressed in another way, the call-up system as previously organized gave way to a system in which men were drafted (or compelled) into the army on a more permanent basis. The regular army thus expanded in size, though not to the size of the total army of former days. Particularly in the new areas of conquest to the east, those who enrolled would have been captives rather than peasants serving a term of conscription. In the areas where the empire was established before 1890, the old organization probably continued, for even when the French had set up posts in an area Samori was still able to control it for some time. The 'volunteer militia' would also have decreased in importance as a separate unit, since horses would not have been readily available to private purchasers. The cavalry was probably simply a wing of the permanent army. The importance of detachments provided by chiefs was intimately related to the nature of Samori's civil administration after 1892 on which there is not much evidence. Chiefs who resisted Samori would see their villages burnt and their people taken for the army or sold as captives. Those who co-operated might be required to furnish detachments, or might see a Samorian official installed to organize recruitment on a more regular basis.

Samori seems to have retained the personal corps, destined for high command in the future, described by Péroz. Thus in June 1898 de Lartigue reported that the personal guard of Samori consisted of *bilakoro* (i.e. raw recruits) who were presumably undergoing special training. But by this time the military tradition of the army had produced a new *élite* corps who were then in the field. These were the 500 *sofa* of Dabadugu.<sup>84</sup> The name derived from a Samorian victory against the French near Kankan in the rainy season of 1891, which was fought by the *élite* corps of the time.<sup>85</sup> This must have then been Samori's personal guard, which acquired through the victory a new *esprit de corps*, and was retained as a unit in subsequent years.

Although against the French Samori employed forces in the neighbourhood of 1,000, his armies which campaigned in outlying areas for long periods grew to a larger size than this, probably by enrolling captives from conquered villages. Bilali's army in February 1891, campaigning in the west, totalled 4,000, although again he used only 1,500 men in repulsing a French expedition from the Southern Rivers.<sup>86</sup> Sarangye Mori's army at the time of the Buna incident (August, 1897) was 7,000–8,000 strong:

<sup>83</sup> The battles of Sombi-ko and Diaman-ko on 10 January 1892 are a good example.

<sup>84</sup> De Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 113 n.

<sup>85</sup> Gouraud, *Souvenirs...*, 76; Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, II, 251. The force had 300 repeaters and 40 cavalry at this time. The battle is described by Arlabosse and by Péroz (Arlabosse, 'Une phase...', 465–9; Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 28–39).

<sup>86</sup> Arcin, *Histoire...*, 483–4.

this after he had been actively campaigning for two years.<sup>87</sup> Other armies on these raiding campaigns were much smaller, perhaps indicating a recent departure from the capital. In the rainy season of 1891, Kali Sidibé raided across the Niger with about 500 men, and at the same time Karamoko was engaged in the area to the north of Kouroussa with some 300 cavalry 'and a certain number of footsoldiers'.<sup>88</sup> In the dry season of 1894-95, Kunadi Keleba, campaigning near Korhogo with a force of 800, was besieged at Pabara by Babemban forces, as was Bilali at Kaloa with probably a similar number.<sup>89</sup> Forces of about this size were used for garrisoning important posts in freshly occupied territory. There are not many figures available for this, but that of 300 *sofa* in a garrison encountered by the French may be representative.<sup>90</sup>

The examples given above show that the classic French exposition of post-1890 Samorian strategy is over-simplified: 'While all the troops armed with repeaters fought against us, retreating foot by foot, those provided only with percussion guns or Chassepots were divided into two groups each with their own function. The first of these groups was responsible for guarding and controlling the population, the second conquered in the east the territories which regained an empire for the sultan towards which he would direct the exodus....'<sup>91</sup> There were always Samorian armies operating on fronts other than the French one, and in particular on Samori's eastern front from 1891 onwards. But there is no reason to suppose that Samori's strategy was so inflexible that there were of necessity two other armies, or that their functions were divided so clearly. The campaigning continued throughout the year, both in conquering new territory and, as far as possible, re-occupying the old, as the French columns retreated when their supply lines had been stretched to the limit by the Samorian 'burn and retire' tactics. In areas where there was no French danger, activities would continue as normal. While Samori fought the Humbert column in 1892, for example, Bilali was engaged against a French mission in the region north of Sierra Leone, and Sekuba was campaigning in the area of Seguéla, pushing to the east, while another army of Samori's, 'the faithful allies of Kabadugu', was marching to the Bagoé.<sup>92</sup> Usually smaller detachments in between maintained links between the larger armies. Against the French Monteil column of 1895, Samori employed three armies, those of Foruba Mussa, Sekuba and Sarangye Mori, while Bilali at least must have been engaged elsewhere.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> L. Tauxier, *Le Noir de Bondoukou* (Paris, Leroux, 1921), 116-17; Claridge, *History of the Gold Coast...*, 427-8. Duboc is almost certainly mistaken in saying 700-800, since the French mission at Dabakala reported at this time that the major part of the army (i.e. more than 2,000 men) was with Sarangye Mori (Duboc, *Samory...*, 108; Mévil, *Samory*, 175 ff.).

<sup>88</sup> Meniaud, *...Pionniers...*, 11, 177, 179. Kali Sidibé's cavalry included some of Ahmadu's ex-*talibés*.

<sup>89</sup> Mévil, *Samory*, 188-.

<sup>90</sup> Diem, 'Document...'.  
<sup>91</sup> Baratier, *A Travers...*, 69-70.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 72-3. See also Péroz, *Au Niger...*, 361-2.

<sup>93</sup> Kouroubari, 'Histoire...', 559

In June 1898 de Lartigue estimated the Samorian army at 12,000 men, of whom about 4,000 were armed with repeaters. From other sources we can obtain some idea of how these numbers were distributed. The 'army of Kong' comprised commands under Moctar and Sarangye Mori at this time: in February they had commanded 2,000–3,000 men and probably still had the same number. At Boribana, Samori had with him Foruba Mussa and Sekuba with 400 repeaters and 1,000 guns of 'different models'. To the west of Kong was the army of Kunadi Keleba, and Bilali was covering Boribana in the west in the region of N'Gauaoui: it would not be unreasonable to allocate 1,000–1,500 men to each of them. Other detachments were under the command of Amadu Ture, Kiesseri, Mori-fin-dian, Mamadiu Beréle and other chiefs of lesser importance, while from the areas of Djimini and Koyaradugu came two detachments totalling 1,500 men together.<sup>94</sup> The period of relative French quiescence from 1895 to 1897 had allowed the Samorian army to grow substantially in size from what it had been during the years 1891–94.

At the time when de Lartigue was gathering his figures on the army, Samori began the march from Boribana to the south-west which was to end in his capture at the end of September 1898. Despite the size of the army and the huge following of 120,000 civilians, the march was carried out with precision and speed, as de Lartigue himself comments.<sup>95</sup> The capture of Sikasso had precipitated the march, and the French victory against Samorian forces at Doué at last broke the morale of the *sofa*, so high during the previous ten years. Samori, who a year earlier had sought to go northward towards the Mossi to build a fresh empire where there were supplies of horses, and guns from the Gold Coast, had now deserted his supplies of horses to move westward where he was better assured of firearms. But he found himself trapped in a mountainous semi-forest region, deserted by many of his troops for the first time, and with vastly decreased mobility. For the first time, too, the French did not halt their offensive with the start of the rainy season, and Samori, deprived of this breathing space, was captured by a small French striking force which burst upon his camp from an unexpected direction on 29 September 1898.

The Samorian army thus had a well-defined structure which was modified over time according to the forces at its disposal, the conditions of campaigning, and the kind and number of firearms and horses Samori was able to obtain. Against the background provided here, each campaign could be studied in greater detail by drawing on locally gathered evidence. In particular such study might cast light on the activities of Samorian forces that were not directly engaged against the French. In broader terms, precise knowledge of Samori's military campaigns and the whereabouts of his armies provides the essential basis for an adequate account of his long resistance, political and diplomatic as well as military.

<sup>94</sup> See de Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 113 n.; Mévil, *Samory*, 189, 212–13.

<sup>95</sup> De Lartigue, '...Rapport...', 114 ff.

## SUMMARY

The army of Samori Ture in 1887 was recruited from four sources: the regular army of *sofa* (infantrymen with firearms), the conscripted reserve of *kurustigi*, detachments sent by chiefs under Samori's protection, and a cavalry force consisting in part, perhaps, of volunteers. The emphasis on infantry rather than cavalry differentiated it from the armies of other nineteenth-century Islamic reformers.

Among the factors which influenced the structure and tactics of the army, as well as the diplomatic and military strategy of the Samorian state, were the supply of firearms and horses. Initially the Samorian army was armed with muskets from the coast, primarily Freetown, and horses from the north-western part of the Sudan. From mid-1891 to mid-1892 the muskets were replaced with breechloaders and repeaters obtained by direct negotiation between Samori and Freetown traders, and during this period or before it an indigenous firearms industry was established. After this, the French advance cut Samori off, partially at least, from his sources of supply; from 1893-98 the search for new supply areas was a major preoccupation of the Samorian regime. Arms came from the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast, and horses from the Mossi states. Here, as formerly in the west, Samori was able to use existing trade routes.

Most writers have assumed that the structure of Samori's army remained constant. The evidence suggests that it built up to its maximum size by 1890, and changed in the process from a force of volunteers to a structured army, with a nucleus of regular officers commanding the mass of conscripts. The acquisition of repeaters, with their greater range, accuracy, and speed of loading, allowed Samori to employ smaller forces of better-trained men, who could be supplied more easily and manoeuvred more effectively. After 1891, therefore, the regular army replaced the conscripts as the major strength of Samori's army. In the later years they may have relied more on indigenously made firearms than on imported weapons.

The length of Samori's period of resistance was largely due to his ability to make effective strategic retreats to areas uncontrolled by the French. The manoeuvrability of his forces, and hence the modern weapons he had, played a major part in making this possible.